

**Remarks at the Swearing-In  
Ceremony for Roderick R. Paige  
as Secretary of Education**

*January 24, 2001*

Thank you very much. Mr. Vice President, thank you very much; Dr. Paige, family members. I look out and see so many Members from the United States Senate. Mr. Chairman, thank you for coming. Senator Kennedy, I appreciate you being here, as well. I don't want to skip anybody, but the reason I mention those two, they happen to be the chairman and ranking minority of the Education Committee. I see Members from the House who are here. Thank you all for coming, as well, of course, Senator Hutchison, from the home State of Dr. Paige and the President—[laughter]—John Culberson from the district which represents Houston. So, thank you for coming. I am honored you are here.

Ladies and gentlemen, it is an honor to witness the swearing-in of a man who will help us see important reforms for education become reality.

The Vice President and I were so pleased to be invited and are pleased to be here in this important building. It is an important moment, and we certainly were not going to miss it. I wanted to see the beginning of a new era in public education.

Dr. Paige and I share a basic commitment: We will work to bring excellence to all public schools all across America. I picked a really good man to run this Department, a man of integrity, a man of common sense, a down-to-earth man who knows how to get the job done.

My administration has no greater priority than education, and Dr. Paige and I share that urgency. And there's no greater champion of reform than the man I am about to witness be sworn in as the Secretary of Education.

Every problem now facing our Nation's public schools Dr. Paige faced as superintendent of the Houston Independent School District: children unable to read at basic levels; falling scores in science and math; problems with discipline and order. Dr. Paige answered those challenges with the

spirit we must now bring to all our schools and all our districts in every State.

He did not tolerate indifference or mediocrity. He demanded the highest standards of students in schools, and people rose to the challenge. He proved that poverty does not need to be a barrier to achievement. He stressed reading as the key to all learning, and he measured progress, holding schools accountable for results. As Dr. Paige takes his new assignment, Houston is now a city proud of its schools and a city more hopeful for its children.

Rod Paige gained his passion for education from his own background. His mother was a librarian, and his dad was a school principal. His three sisters have dedicated their careers to teaching and education. And we welcome them to this ceremony today.

In his distinguished career, Rod Paige has seen firsthand what works. He has not just talked about education reform; he's practiced it. And that's why I picked him. He has shown an ability to reach across party lines, to cross old divisions for the sake of our children. I value all these qualities, and our country needs them.

We have great and urgent work to do. I'm honored to have this good man to be our partner in reform.

NOTE: The President spoke at 1:24 p.m. in the Barnard Auditorium at the Department of Education. In his remarks, he referred to Senator James M. Jeffords, chairman, Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pension; and Representative John Culberson, newly elected to Texas' Seventh Congressional District. The transcript released by the Office of the Press Secretary also included the remarks of Secretary Paige.

**Remarks at Merritt Extended  
Elementary School**

*January 25, 2001*

It's always a good sign when the principal gets a standing ovation—[laughter]—from teachers and parents. Having spent some quality time with you, I now understand why.

First, Mr. Superintendent, thank you very much. Your reputation is a strong one because you believe every child can learn and are willing to work hard and make the tough